
Securing a Place for Reading in Composition

by Ellen C. Carillo. Logan: Utah State UP, 2015. 199 pp.



In *Securing a Place for Reading in Composition*, Ellen Carillo wonders why “reading did not establish itself as one of the field’s primary subjects” (3), save for the 1980s and 1990s when there was a

significant amount of research on reading. Offering many possibilities for this failure, and considering how we might reinvigorate reading research and scholarship, Carillo calls for opening the conversation of reintroducing reading instruction into first-year writing courses, the teaching of reading practices in graduate courses, amending outcomes and other documents of the CCCC and WPA to include the importance of reading practices, and obtaining funds for reading research. A tall order, but Carillo is successful in her call for action. *Securing a Place for Reading in Composition*, its six chapters and three appendixes, builds a solid foundation for her inquiry and vision for the future.

She begins with a broad overview of past and current tensions between writing and reading and her assertion: “To leave the work of defining reading to other fields, even related fields like literary studies and education, means that composition is forfeiting the right to define reading and its relationship to writing” (11). Citing the fact that much of the scholarship on reading and reading practices at the college level is

inconsistent and limited, she further posits that engaging in reading research will offer rich insight, resources, and support for teaching writing. Chapter 2 details her national survey where she sought to locate the current position of reading in the FYC classroom. One hundred first-year writing instructors and a small cohort of students from two- and four-year colleges completed a survey, with a small percentage of the interviewees participating in follow-up interviews. Her findings revealed that, while teachers were addressing teaching reading in their classrooms, they expressed a lack of graduate preparation, faculty development, and recent scholarship about reading.

Carillo argues that, to reintroduce reading in composition, we need to better understand the reading-writing relationship and how teaching reading has come to be associated with remediation, the lower grades, and the field of education. Chapter 3 traces this history from the 1700s: reading as recitation under rhetoric; a series of shifts and turns as reading becomes reading literature in service of writing; the New Critics furthering the division; writing’s brief association with and subsequent split from communications; the specialization of literary theory and scholarship; composition’s deliberate distancing from literature and reading as it struggled to define itself; education and communication’s increasing concentration on reading; reader-response theory decentralizing the text; all leading to where reading is located now. Carillo uses chapter 4 to examine the reading scholarship generated during the prolific period of reading research, 1980–1993. She notes the “slips” and

“conflations” further complicating and confusing reading’s place within the field of composition. She identifies specific examples from articles where discussions of the practices of reading (verb) “slips” into a discussion of kinds of readings (noun) used in class, and how discussions of reading and writing become “conflated” with composition theory and literary theory.

Preparing students for reading in their other classes suggests that *how* a student reads must be transferrable. To that end, Carillo introduces the concept of teaching for transfer through a metacognitive framework employing “mindful” reading explained in chapters 5 and 6. Carillo does not promote a particular type of reading, but she believes our work is to cultivate in our students knowledge and awareness of their own reading processes as they read a variety of texts. She ends with sample metacognition exercises used in her own composition classes.

Carillo’s book arrives at an opportune time, particularly for the two-year college instructor, facing nontraditional and often unprepared students who arrive in composition classrooms without solid reading backgrounds. We already know that many students will leave col-

lege and join the workforce. And, as we learn from the ACT report “Ready for College and Ready for Work: Same or Different,” the readiness level in reading is the same for college courses as it is for workforce training programs. Our students need to know how to read, no matter where they end up.

Securing a Place for Reading in Composition, offering a foundational overview of the situation of reading and what we can and should do to initiate changes, is ideal for two-year college WPAs or those involved in reading across the curriculum. An excellent resource, this text serves to inform curricula and pedagogy; additionally, sections of the book can easily support faculty development for writing teachers in the two-year college.

Work Cited

ACT. “Ready for College and Ready for Work: Same or Different.” Iowa City: ACT, 2006. Web. 4 Oct. 2015.

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